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ABSTRACT

This study examined the experiences of students in the six New Zealand colleges of education who undertook a 3-year course of training to work in early childhood centers. The study aimed to find out students' expected employment following their training among child care, kindergarten, or other early childhood services, monitor any changes in the students' intentions during training, and establish the employment patterns of students in the first year after training. The students in the training were surveyed by the same questionnaire at the end of training year or at the first year of employment. The findings showed that while in the beginning of training the majority of students had preferred work places, 78 percent favored working in kindergartens when they had completed their preservice courses. Generally the training courses provide students with a wider range of services, and this encouraged students to think more positively about working in services other than kindergartens. Students appeared to be committed to work in early childhood and believed that their training prepared them well for their chosen profession. They were also appreciative of the opportunity provided for their own personal development, especially in the areas of human relations, communication skills, and awareness of equity issues. (AP)

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A Study of Early Childhood Training

Margery Renwick
and
Sally Boyd

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Margery Renwick
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New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Wellington
1995

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The Department of Education provided a grant to fund the first year of the study. This report is published with finance made available by the Education Officers, Early Childhood Education Association of New Zealand. This association ceased to exist in 1989 and their residual funds were allocated to research.

BACKGROUND

Prior to 1988 all students wishing to train to become kindergarten teachers undertook a 2-year training course at 1 of 6 teachers' colleges, now known as colleges of education. Students wishing to train to be childcare workers had a variety of options including a 1-year course at a teachers' college or college of education or undertaking field-based training. A number of other qualifications were recognised for funding in the childcare area, but those which were specifically childcare qualifications were of varying standards and none equalled the length and breadth of kindergarten training courses.

In June 1985 the Minister of Education approved the establishment of a working party to examine 3-year training for kindergarten teachers. A second working party which focused on childcare training reported in December, 1986. Included in the terms of reference of the childcare working party was the requirement:

> to examine the three-year report on kindergarten teacher training and suggest ways of incorporating childcare training within its recommendations.[1]

In its report the working party recommended that:

> any training development for childcare be viewed as part of an integrated early childhood qualification, which should be a three year, common-core course in early childhood education, or its part-time equivalent.

The report of the working party for kindergarten teachers[2] had already recommended that 3-year training be implemented in 2 colleges per year over a 3-year period. This course of action was accepted by the government of the day. In 1988 Dunedin and Palmerston North enrolled the first intake of students undertaking the new integrated training course for kindergarten teachers and childcare workers. Christchurch and Hamilton followed in 1989, and Auckland and Wellington in 1990.

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[1] *See* Department of Education (1986). *Report of the Working Party in Three Year Training.* Wellington, Department of Education. (p. 5)

[2] *See* Department of Education (1986). *Report of the Working Party on Childcare Training.* Wellington, Department of Education.

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) received a modest grant in 1988 and 1989 from the then Department of Education to enable a researcher to establish a data base related to the introduction of the 3-year integrated training programme for early childhood training by:

(i) Finding out students' anticipated employment-following training, that is, childcare, kindergarten, or other early childhood services.
(ii) Monitoring any changes in students' intentions during training about subsequent employment.
(iii) Establishing the employment patterns of students in the first year after training.

The study has since been funded by NZCER.

Methodology

One of the researchers visited each college at the end of the first year the colleges received students. She made return visits at the end of the students' second and third years. In each case students completed a questionnaire after a group discussion. In 1991 the students who had trained in Dunedin and Palmerston North were surveyed by postal questionnaire to ascertain their first teaching position and to comment on some of their experiences during their first year of employment. The same questionnaire was sent in subsequent years to students who had completed their 3-year training in Hamilton, Christchurch, Auckland, and Wellington.

This Report

This report includes findings from each year of our study. As the new courses of early childhood training were introduced by 2 colleges per year, students began their training in different years. In some instances we have compared student responses across colleges according to whether students were in their first, second, or third year, and, where appropriate, we tested for statistical significance. Statistical differences proved to be rare, probably because of the small sample size of some groups. Although different trends emerged between colleges, comparisons between colleges have been difficult for 3 reasons. Firstly, much of the data was qualitative and difficult to quantify. Secondly, there was a considerable difference in the size of the student intake at the 6 colleges. Thirdly, because the introduction of the course was staggered across colleges, there was a difference of 3 years between when the first and third intakes began their training. In a rapidly changing educational world, differences in starting dates may also have influenced students' attitudes towards various issues and other factors.

The Sample

Table 1 shows the number of students by college who completed questionnaires in each year.

Table 1
Students who completed questionnaires

	Year One N = 316		Year Two N = 260		Year Three N = 201		Ex-students N = 153	
1988	Pn Nth	44						
	Dun	28						
1989	Ham	37	Pn Nth	36				
	Chch	51	Dun	27				
1990	Akld	99	Ham	30	Pn Nth	32		
	Wgtn	57	Chch	32	Dun	8		
			Anon	3	Anon	3		
1991			Akld	81	Ham	20	Pn Nth	29
			Wgtn	51	Chch	31	Dun	20
1992					Akld	64	Ham	16
					Wgtn	43	Chch	26
1993							Akld	41
							Wgtn	21

Table 1 demonstrates the variation in sample size between colleges ranging from 28 in Dunedin to 99 in Auckland. The sample size reflects the variation in student intake by college but is not an exact indication of how many students enrolled. The researcher visited each college in the first year and as most students were present and filled in questionnaires at the time, the initial response rate was high. This was not always so in subsequent years. The situation was compounded by the fact that in the third year those students, particularly in Dunedin, who were also undertaking a degree were not present at the college in their third year. During each year there was also a reduction in student numbers in each college, which partly, but not entirely, explains the diminishing number of completed questionnaires. In the final year of the study only 48 percent of those who had completed questionnaires as first-year students completed questionnaires as ex-students. This percentage varied by college from 71 percent of ex-Dunedin students to only 37 percent of ex-Wellington students. Those percentages were influenced by the attrition rate of students undertaking the training; the number who did not gain teaching positions in their first year; and the difficulty of tracing students when they had left the college.

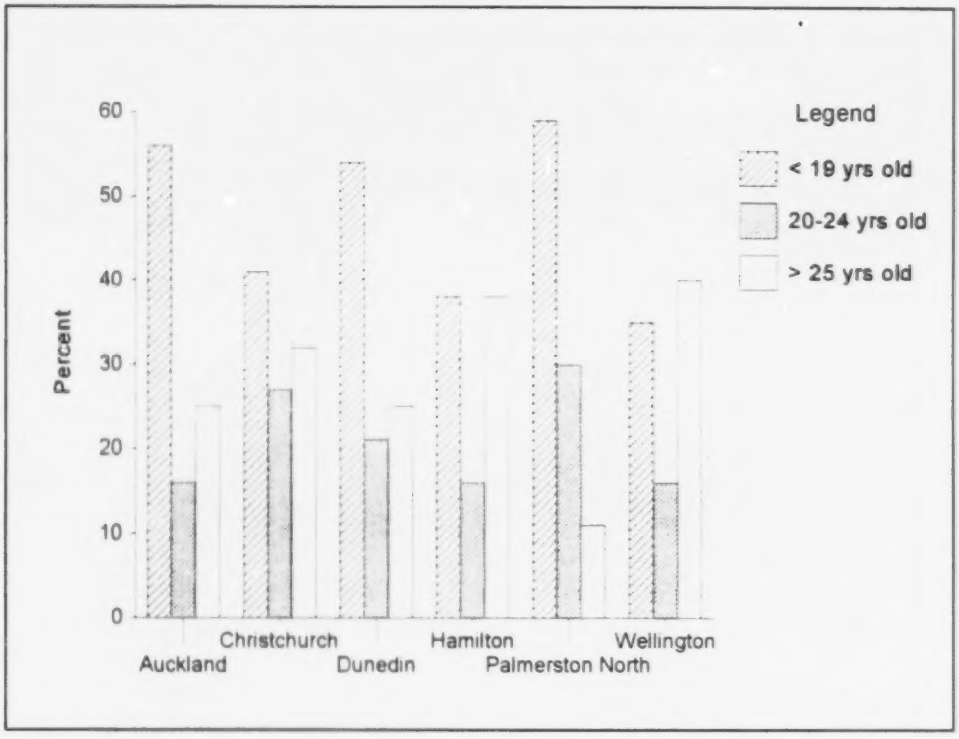
Gender

Of the 316 students who completed a questionnaire in the first year, 302 (96 percent) were female and 10 (3 percent) were male. Christchurch had a disproportionate number of male students - 4 out of the 10 males came from this college.

Age

In their first year, half of the students 151 (50 percent) were 19 years or younger; 64 (21 percent) were between 20-24 years of age; 89 (29 percent) were 25 years or older. Palmerston North students tended to be younger than those in the other colleges, only 5 students (11 percent) being 25 years of age or older. In the other colleges the percentage of students who were 25 years or older ranged from 25 percent in Auckland to 40 percent in Wellington (*see* figure 1).

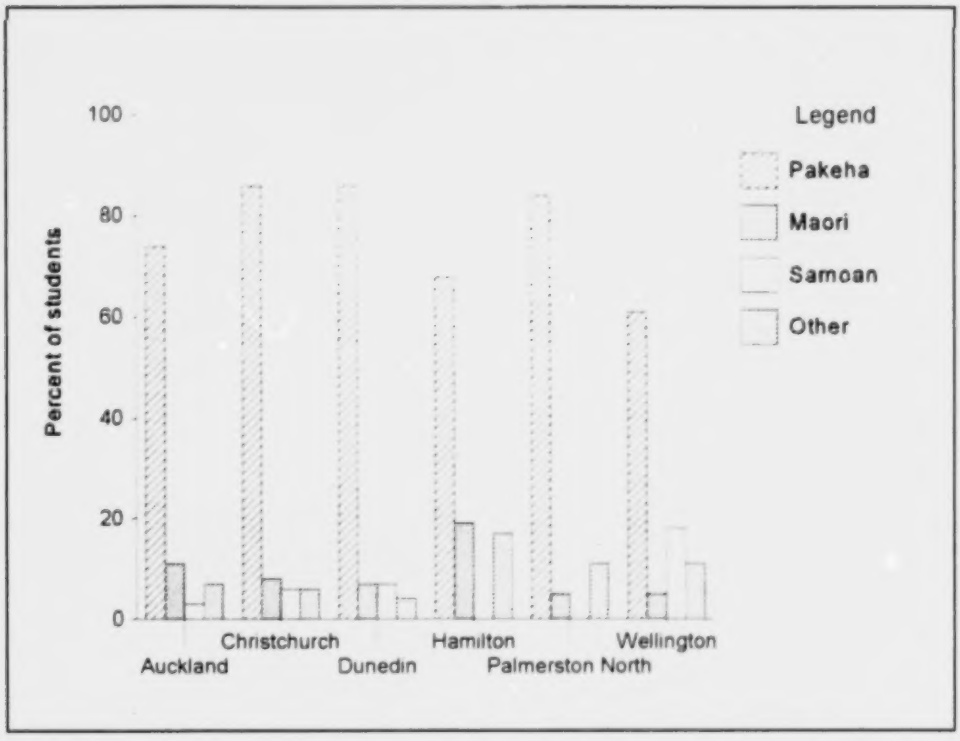
Figure 1
Age of students
(N = 304)



Ethnicity

Three-quarters of the first-year students (235) described themselves as Pakeha or non-Maori New Zealanders. A further 26 (8 percent) described themselves as Maori. More than a quarter (27 percent) of the students who described themselves as Maori were from the Hamilton College of Education. The third largest group of students described themselves as Samoan (16). Ten of these students attended the Wellington College of Education. Most of the rest were from Hamilton *(see* figure 2).

Figure 2
How would you describe yourself?
(N = 307)



As one would expect, English was the first language of most students (88 percent), followed by Samoan (4 percent) and Maori (3 percent). Other languages mentioned by students included other European languages, Tokelauan, Cantonese, African languages, Korean, and Tongan. Wellington had the highest percentage of students (25 percent) for whom English was *not* their first language.

Qualifications and Previous Experience

Academic and Vocational Qualifications

Two hundred and eighteen, or 70 percent of the students, had a 6th form qualification when they began their training. One student had a 7th form certificate; 2 had completed university papers and 1 a BA; and 1 had a teachers certificate. Forty-four entered with school certificate. Wellington students were less likely to have formal qualifications than students from other colleges. For example about 30 percent had fewer than 4 years of secondary schooling, compared with Palmerston North where only 5 percent of students fell into this category.

About a third of the students had vocational qualifications they considered to be relevant to early childhood, for example, playcentre certificates for parent helping, nannying, nursing, family-life education, and community care. One student described herself as a kaiawhina. About a third of the students also had first-aid, life-saving, or water-safety certificates.

Secondary Work Experience in Early Childhood

When the students were surveyed in their first year, almost half (46 percent) said they had had secondary school work experience in an early childhood centre, and for most of these (87 percent) this had influenced their decision to train in this field. It may also be true of course, that those secondary students who had already decided to train for early childhood chose, while they were at secondary school, to add to their knowledge by taking part in work experience in an early childhood setting.

Students as Parents

One quarter of the students (80) were themselves parents. Wellington students were more likely than those from other colleges to be parents (40 percent). All but 2 of the students who were parents had used early childhood services for their own children. Most had used either 2 or 3 services with 1 parent using 6 services and a further 4 parents using 5 early childhood services. The early childhood services used most often were:

- NZ Free Kindergarten (67 percent)
- Playgroup (41 percent)
- Playcentre (37 percent)

Other services used were:

- All-day childcare (25 percent)
- Regular paid caregiver for child (24 percent)
- Kohanga reo (16 percent)
- Sessional childcare (14 percent)
- Private kindergarten (9 percent)
- Pacific Island early childhood education centre (9 percent)

Work in Early Childhood Centres

More than half of the students, 171 or 54 percent, said that they had worked in an early childhood centre before they started the course, often in more than one. Students were most likely to have worked in a kindergarten (72); followed by an all-day childcare centre (51); and a playcentre (33). Smaller numbers had worked in a creche (21); a kohanga reo (16); a Pacific Island early childhood education centre (8); or sessional childcare (7). Sixty-five of these students described themselves as volunteers; 63 indicated that they were paid employees; and 30 said they were parent helpers. The remaining students fell into an "other" category which included untrained reliever, nanny trainee, and school work experience.

As such a high proportion of students had some experience of early childhood services before entering college, it was not surprising that virtually all students felt they knew something about early childhood training when they started the course, with 80 percent saying they knew either "a little" or "quite a bit".

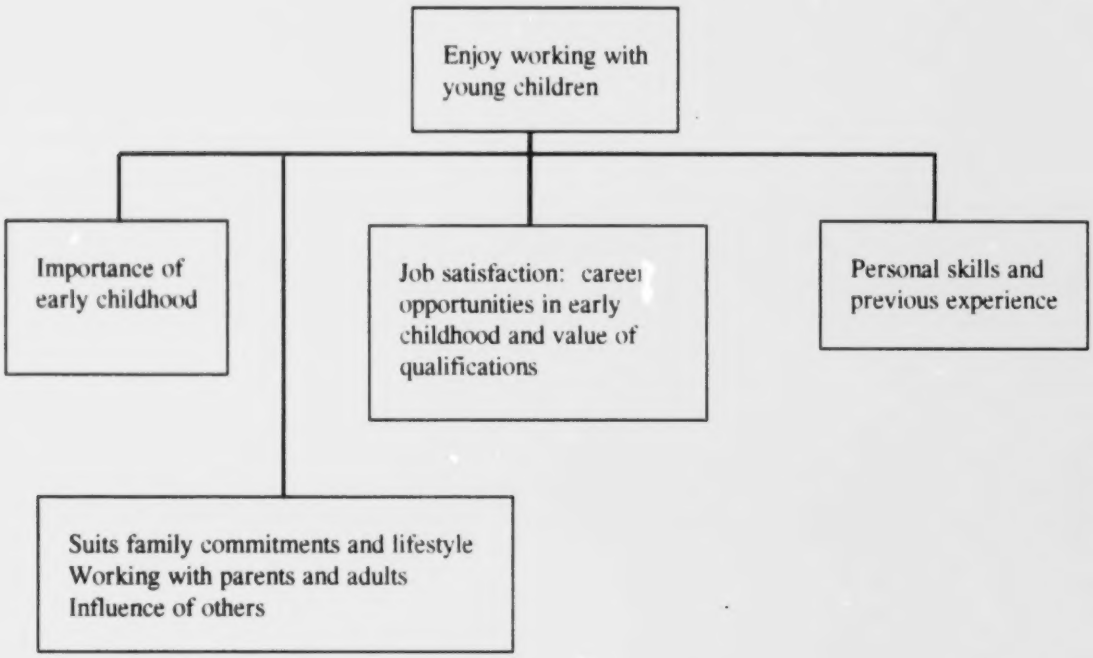
REASONS FOR CHOOSING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The first-year students were asked to respond to the statement:

I chose to train for early childhood because:

The reasons given by students are summarised in the diagram below.

Diagram 1
Reasons for training for early childhood


Enjoy working with young children
Importance of early childhood
Job satisfaction: career opportunities in early childhood and value of qualifications
Personal skills and previous experience
Suits family commitments and lifestyle
Working with parents and adults
Influence of others

Enjoy Working With Young Children

The most common reason given by most students for wanting to train to work in early childhood was a love of young children and pleasure in their company. They find young children "interesting", "rewarding", "inspiring", and want to share their knowledge with them. Such students sometimes commented that they had wanted to work with this age group for a number of years. A few specified particular groups of children they wished to work with, for example, those in a kohanga reo.

The Importance of Early Childhood

About a third of the students referred to the importance of the preschool years which many regard as the basis for, or key to, future education and experience:

> I believe early childhood is a vital part of education and I want to contribute in the best possible way.

> I believe the years 0-5 are the most important in development. I want to be involved in children of this age group and feel that I was contributing to their development.

Students frequently referred to an interest in child development and a desire to find out more about how children learn and develop. For some, this was because of a strongly held belief in children's rights - all children have a right to care and education. Students want to play their part in providing a loving and supportive environment which will help children develop their own self-esteem and empower them.

Job Satisfaction

About a third of the students also referred to job satisfaction and career opportunities in early childhood education. For some, particularly those who enrolled in the first years of the new integrated training courses, it was because they thought early childhood was an expanding area:

> I felt it is a growth service at present with exciting things happening and I want to be part of it.

> Growing industry: early childhood really starting to go places.

Others saw training for early childhood as giving them a goal and sense of direction; and enabling them to get started on a stable, secure career which would be "rewarding" and "challenging". A few mentioned that establishing themselves in a career was important for their children's security as well as their own.

Early childhood provides an opportunity to work with people, rather than to work in an office. The work was varied, with scope for personal initiative. Several students said they wanted to work in education and they preferred early childhood to primary or secondary because of the more "relaxed atmosphere". One or two students also acknowledged that their academic qualifications would not have enabled them to enter training for other branches of the education service. The hours of work and regular holidays were also attractive. Early childhood training provides students with qualifications which would be useful for overseas travel or for work in areas of particular interest, such as caring for children with special needs or as a nanny. Yet others liked early childhood education because it was a community-based service.

Some students felt they had been volunteers for long enough and wanted to capitalise on their experience by gaining professional recognition. Others, who commented on the importance of gaining professional qualifications, believed that a qualification in early childhood could be a useful basis for further, more specialised training. One student, for example, thought she would later like to train to be a child psychologist and another wanted to be a speech therapist. Students enrolled at the university considered the degree "an extra plus".

Personal Skills and Previous Experience

About a quarter of the students referred to skills they had which made them particularly suitable for working with young children. These were commonly personal qualities such as "energy", "patience", "a sense of humour", or an "ability to communicate with young children". They felt their experience showed that not only did they like young children but young children enjoyed them.

> I feel I have a great relationship with all children. They like me and I like them.
>
> I can offer them a great deal - ideas, time, love.

Other students said that they had particular skills such as artistic abilities which would be useful. A number of students referred to experiences they had had in a range of early childhood services including working for the Crippled Children's Society, social work, being a parent helper at school, being involved with families as a minister's wife, and work experience as a school pupil. This work was frequently voluntary, but there were students who had previously been in paid employment in early childhood, including those who had worked overseas. Several students referred to earlier work in a kohanga reo, which they had usually done without special training, and they now thought that both for their own satisfaction, and the sake of the children with whom they were working, they should undertake more formal training. One student said she had:

> Worked in a kohanga reo for quite some time and I feel I need to learn more aspects of early childhood education to increase the quality of learning for these children.

Another commented that she wanted to:

> Take the pakeha knowledge to nga kohanga reo enhancing the parallels between the two systems.

These students usually had a particular desire to work with Maori children. A similar group were interested in being closely involved with Pacific Island families, helping both the parents and the children. Several students said they thought their experience as a parent qualified them particularly for work in the area.

Miscellaneous

In a range of other comments there were students who referred to the fact that a career in early childhood fitted in with their lifestyle and family commitments. When students spoke of family commitments, they were sometimes talking of their own children who were also preschoolers, but in other cases it was older children becoming less dependent and so enabling the parent(s) to train for a career themselves. Yet another group of students were looking forward to the time when they would become parents and they thought an early childhood training, as well as leading to a job now, would prepare them for their parenting role.

A few students said they wanted a career where they worked with adults as well as children. One or two of these had been influenced by the women's movement and wanted to work "with and for women"; a few referred to the influence of others, usually mothers or friends, in their decision to train for early childhood; and a few said they were training for early childhood because other careers were difficult to get into, for example, nursing and art school. One or two were motivated by religious conviction.

Commitment to Early Childhood

In an attempt to ascertain whether students were committed to work in early childhood or would perhaps prefer to work elsewhere, we asked them to respond to a series of statements:

- Working in early childhood was my first choice of career.
- I would have preferred to train as a primary teacher.
- I would have preferred to train as a secondary teacher.
- Apart from breaks for personal reasons (e.g., travel, family), I expect to make a lifelong career in early childhood education.
- I rather "drifted" into early childhood education.
- Being a student is probably as important to me as thinking about my future as an early childhood worker.
- Had it been possible, I would have preferred to do field-based training.

The student responses across all colleges are summarised in table 2.

Table 2

Students' commitment to early childhood education - N = 316

Statement of motivation	N	%
Early childhood - lifelong	199	65
Early childhood - first choice	186	60
Enjoy being a student	106	34
Drifted in	45	16
Prefer primary	32	10
Prefer field based	56	17
Prefer secondary	3	-
Total	627*	202

These totals reflect the fact that many students made more than one response.

It will be seen from table 2 that when they began their training about two-thirds of the students indicated that they intended to make a lifelong career in early childhood, and that early childhood was their first choice of career. However, a third also said that being a student was as important to them as thinking about their future as an early childhood worker. There were variations by college in the students' responses to these questions. None of these were statistically significant, but certain trends emerged. These were:

- Students in Dunedin were the most likely to say early childhood education was their first choice of a career (75 percent). Students in Hamilton (54 percent) and Auckland (58 percent) were the least likely to say this was the case.

- Students in Dunedin were also most likely to regard early childhood education as a lifelong career (75 percent), as were students in Hamilton (70 percent). Students in Wellington (56 percent) and Auckland (61 percent) were the least likely to see it as a lifelong career.
- Students in Palmerston North were the most likely to say they rather "drifted" into early childhood education (27 percent). Twenty-two percent of students in Christchurch also responded in this way.
- Students in Hamilton were the most likely to say they would have preferred field-based training (27 percent), followed by Christchurch (20 percent) and Wellington (19 percent). Only 3 Dunedin students indicated this preference.
- Of the 32 students who said they would have preferred to train for primary teaching, 14 came from Auckland and 7 from Palmerston North. Several of these latter students commented that when they enrolled they had thought the course was intended to prepare students to work with children from birth to 8 years.

First- and Second-year Students Who Expected To Complete the Course of Training

At the end of their first year most students expected to complete their course. The percentage was highest in Dunedin and Palmerston North, where 89 percent of students thought they would do so, and lowest in Wellington, with 74 percent of students. Only 5 students from all colleges said they did *not* expect to complete the course, most of the remainder being at this stage "unsure". The most common explanation was financial problems. Family considerations, travel, and a wish to pursue other careers were reasons given by other students. A few students from each college said they did not like the course.

In their second year most students (88 percent) also said they expected to finish the course. The percentages by college ranged from 83 percent in Hamilton to 97 percent in Christchurch. Once again, very few students indicated that they did *not* expect to finish the course, most of the remainder being unsure.

Educational Reforms

Two reports on major educational reforms were published in 1988, the year the first intake of students began their 3-year early childhood training. One, *The Meade Report*, concerned early childhood education.[3] The second, *Tomorrow's Schools*, was to do with primary education.[4]

The students were asked if they thought the reforms taking place in the educational administration would be likely to affect them. In retrospect, it may have been more appropriate to have included only the report to do with early childhood education. The students' responses are summarised by college in table 3.

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[3] See *Education to be More: Report of the Early Childhood Care and Education Working Group* (1988). Wellington, Government Printer.

[4] See *Tomorrow's Schools: The Reform of Education Administration in New Zealand* (1988). Wellington, Department of Education.

Table 3

Changes in education administration would affect students

N = 316

	Dun 1988 N=28 %	Pn Nth 1988 N=44 %	Chch 1989 N=51 %	Ham 1989 N=37 %	Akld 1990 N=99 %	Wgtn 1990 N=57 %
Yes	48	60	51	51	28	32
No	4	2	2	3	6	9
Don't know	48	37	43	40	63	49
No response	-	1	4	6	3	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

There appeared to be a tendency for students who started their training furthest from the date of the reports' publication to be less likely to think they would be affected by the reports. Students who indicated in what ways they thought they might be affected, clearly thought that there would be more adequate funding for early childhood services. Not only would centres benefit, but wages and conditions for staff would be improved and adult/child ratios would be lowered. Improved funding would lead to more importance being attached to early childhood education. A few students also hoped pay parity between childcare workers and kindergarten teachers would become a reality. Students also thought employment opportunities would be affected. A few thought new career opportunities would open up because the number of available childhood services would increase and centres would be staffed more generously. Others thought changes would occur because of the integration of early childhood and the amalgamation of the Kindergarten Teachers Association (KTA) and the Early Childhood Workers Union (ECWU).[5]

Students thought the role of parents and the community would change with parents having more power to make decisions and teachers having to be more accountable to parents. Parents might also have more say in teacher appointments, and in the curriculum provided. The introduction of charters for early childhood centres would mean prospective staff would have to agree with the centre's charter before they accepted a job.

They also thought that students would need to become better qualified. Higher qualifications should lead to better job prospects and better pay. All of this would lead to improved standards in the quality of early childhood education and to early childhood teachers being recognised as more professionally trained and more comparable with teachers in other branches of the teaching service.

A few students referred to the fact that there would be changes in early childhood regulations but did not specify what any of the changes were or how they might be affected. Others acknowledged that they did not know enough about new policies to make specific comments although as they would be the future teachers they could not help but be affected. A few commented on their powerlessness and uncertainty in the face of change.

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[5] This amalgamation took place in 1990.

PREFERRED EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE

As stated in the introduction, a major focus of this study was to establish whether or not students at the beginning of their training had a clear idea as to which early childhood service they hoped to later be employed in, and why. Were there also services they did *not* want to work in, and why? Did their views change during training?

The majority of students in each year of their training did have a clear idea of which service they wished to work in and the percentage of students over the 6 colleges increased each year. However, there were variations by college. In Hamilton, for example the percentage of students dropped in the second year.

In their first year, 69 percent of students across all colleges said they had a preferred service in mind. The percentages by college are given in table 4.

Table 4

First-year students who had a clear idea of preferred early childhood service

N = 314

College	N	%
Auckland	66	67
Hamilton	26	70
Palmerston North	34	79
Wellington	33	62
Christchurch	39	77
Dunedin	15	56
College not specified	4	
Total	217	69*

* Denotes average percentage across all colleges

It will be seen that there was some variation by college ranging from 56 percent in Dunedin to 79 percent in Palmerston North.

In the second year, the percentage of students across the 6 colleges who said they had a preferred service had increased to 73 percent. These responses varied by college, 92 percent of Palmerston North students stating that they had a clear idea of what service they would like to work in compared with 60 percent of Hamilton students. In Christchurch and Dunedin the percentage was 78 percent; in Wellington

74 percent; and in Auckland 64 percent. By their third year, 82 percent of students across the 6 colleges said they had a preferred service. Once again there were variations by college; although the variation was less than in previous years and ranged from 74 percent in Christchurch to 84 percent in Auckland and Palmerston North.

First-year Students' Preferred Service

Of the 69 percent of students who said they had a preferred service, three-quarters, across the 6 colleges, indicated that their preferred service was a kindergarten. Once again there were variations by college as seen in table 5.

Table 5

Percentage of first-year students with a preferred service, who preferred kindergarten

N = 217

College	N	%
Auckland	44	67
Hamilton	15	58
Palmerston North	29	85
Wellington	23	70
Christchurch	36	92
Dunedin	12	80
College not specified	4	
Total	163	75*

* Denotes average percentage across all colleges

It will be seen from table 5 that the percentage of first-year students who said they had a preferred service and preferred kindergarten ranged from 58 percent in Hamilton to 92 percent in Christchurch. It is important to stress that these percentages refer to those first-year students who said they had a preferred service in the first place. If we take the sample as a whole and look at the numbers of students who said they preferred kindergarten, the percentage is considerably lower (53 percent as shown in table 6).

Table 6

Percentage of all first-year students who preferred kindergarten

N = 314

College	N	%
Auckland	44	44
Hamilton	15	41
Palmerston North	29	66
Wellington	29	51
Christchurch	36	71
Dunedin	13	46
College not specified	4	
Total	166	53*

* Denotes average percentage across all colleges

First-year Students Who Preferred Childcare

Fourteen percent or fewer of those first-year students across all colleges who said they had a preferred service, indicated that childcare would be their preferred service. The actual number of students in each college was small - Auckland (8); Hamilton (2); Palmerston North (3); Wellington (6); Christchurch (4); and Dunedin (4).

First-year Students Who Preferred Nga Kohanga Reo or Pacific Island Early Childhood Education Centres

Nga kohanga reo and Pacific Island early childhood education centres were the preferred service of a small number of first-year students. Nga kohanga reo were mentioned by 5 students in Auckland and Hamilton; 2 in Wellington and Christchurch; and none in Palmerston North and Dunedin. Pacific Island early childhood education centres were mentioned by 5 students in Wellington; 2 in Auckland and Christchurch; 1 in Hamilton and Dunedin; and none in Palmerston North.

First-year Students Who Preferred Other Early Childhood Services

Ten percent of students across the 6 colleges referred to early childhood services outside the mainstream, for example, working as a nanny, working with children with special needs, and being an education officer.

Services Preferred by Second- and Third-year Students

As shown previously in their second year nearly three-quarters of the students across the 6 colleges (73 percent), said they had a clear idea of which early childhood service they would like to work in when they finished their training. In their third year the percentage had increased to 82 percent. In their second and third years, students who had said they had a preferred early childhood service were again asked to specify which one. Their responses by years and by colleges are summarised in tables 7 and 8. Once again it must be stressed that the percentages of students refer to those who said they had a preferred service in the first place. If the sample as a whole was looked at, the percentages preferring each service would be lower. It should also be noted that 30 (12 percent) of students in their second year, and 53 (26 percent) in their third ticked more than one service, indicating that they were prepared to work in more than one setting.

Table 7

Preferred service of second-year students who had a preferred service by college

N = 191

Service	Chch N=26 %	Ham N=17 %	Pn Nth N=33 %	Dun N=20 %	Akld N=51 %	Wgtn N=42 %
Kindergarten	69	71	70	80	69	88
All-day childcare	23	24	24	30	20	12
Sessional childcare	12	-	6	15	6	2
Kohanga reo	4	12	-	5	6	-
Pacific Island ECE centre	4	-	-	-	6	5
Other	15	6	18	-	10	5
Total*	127	113	118	130	117	112

* All percentages do not total to 100 as some students did not reply and others indicated more than 1 preferred service. Two students did not specify their college.

Table 8

Preferred service of third-year students who had a preferred service by college

N = 162

Service	Chch N=23 %	Ham N=15 %	Pn Nth N=27 %	Dun* N=8 %	Akld N=54 %	Wgtn N=35 %
Kindergarten	83	67	100	100	67	77
All-day childcare	26	53	4	25	33	20
Sessional childcare	17	33	7	-	15	9
Kohanga reo	-	20	-	-	6	6
Pacific Island ECE centre	4	13	-	-	6	9
Family daycare	-	20	-	25	2	-
Nannying	26	20	4	13	6	9
IHC intervention	13	27	7	13	11	-
Montessori	4	13	4	-	2	-
Other	4	7	7	-	13	9
Total**	177	273	133	176	161	139

* The number of third-year Dunedin students is low because many of the intake were full-time university students in that year.

** All percentages do not total to 100 as many students selected more than 1 service. Three students did not specify their college.

We do not have sufficient information to draw any conclusions about the differences in the students' responses by college but it is likely that the ethnic composition of the student intake has influenced students' preference for working in nga kohanga reo and Pacific Island early childhood education centres, particularly in Hamilton. It is also possible that staff at Hamilton have encouraged students to think more positively about childcare as a preferred service.

Students Who Preferred Kindergarten

For those students in each year who said they had a preferred service, the percentage preferring kindergarten remained remarkably consistent - 75 percent in years 1 and 2, and 78 percent in year 3. If the sample is looked at as a whole, that is all students regardless of whether or not they had a preferred service, the percentage preferring kindergartens is lower but it does increase with each year - 52 percent in year 1, 55 percent in year 2, and 64 percent in year 3.

Students Who Preferred Childcare

For those students in each year who said they had a preferred service, the percentage preferring childcare increased by more than 10 percent each year - 16 percent in year 1, 27 percent in year 2, and 40 percent in year 3. If the sample is looked at as a whole, that is all students regardless of whether or not they had a preferred service, the percentage preferring childcare is lower but the percentage increase is similar - 11 percent in year 1, 20 percent in year 2, and 33 percent in year 3.

Our evidence suggests that initially approximately half of the students over all wanted to work in kindergartens and one-tenth in childcare. By their third year approximately two-thirds over all were still interested in kindergarten but one-third would now like, or were prepared, to work in childcare.[6]

It is important to note that when students who had a preferred service indicated which service they had in mind a number indicated more than one. Those who initially had kindergarten in mind, continued to do so but an increasing number each year were also prepared to consider childcare.

Other Preferred Services

There were also several other early childhood services mentioned by students, for example, IHC/early intervention and Montessori.

Reasons for First-year Students' Choice

Kindergarten

There were 3 main reasons given by students who said they would prefer to work in a kindergarten, and all were by way of comparison with childcare.

1. Firstly, the better pay and conditions of service, including hours of work, "time out" between sessions, time for preparation, and holidays. Several students noted that the kindergarten salaries were still too low but at least more reasonable than childcare. Students also believed kindergartens are better equipped than childcare centres.

2. Secondly, students preferred the slightly older children in kindergartens. They also thought the narrower age range of children was easier to manage, particularly with different groups in the afternoon from the morning. They thought this arrangement was likely to allow the teacher to spend more time with individual children. Some students said they found working with older children "more of a challenge", others that they preferred them because of their more advanced language development. A few stated that they were not comfortable with infants and toddlers.

3. Thirdly, students believed kindergartens were better organised and had more structured programmes. Kindergartens were regarded as more educational and the children better disciplined. Children attended more regularly, with less coming and going. Several students referred to childcare centres as places where carers just "looked after children all day". They wanted to be involved in

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[6] The shift in student attitudes towards the possibility of working in childcare as compared with kindergarten was confirmed by Harding (1990) who looked at the career intentions of a later cohort of students at Palmerston North. However, although she found that childcare was regarded as a "viable work option" (p. 35) by an increasing number of students, they were likely to regard employment in childcare as a stopgap measure only until a kindergarten position was available because of the lower pay and less attractive working conditions in childcare.

an "educational programme" rather than "just babysitting". Such students were likely to say they preferred to be involved with children's learning rather than to have to spend time on routine toileting and feeding, particularly the "mucky jobs".

Other aspects mentioned by a smaller number of students were that they only had experience of kindergartens, so they did not know much if anything about childcare before they started training; that they thought the relationship with other trained staff in kindergarten would be more stimulating; and that they believed kindergartens provided better career opportunities.

Childcare

There were 3 main reasons given by students who preferred childcare:

1. Firstly, centres were open for longer hours. As families tended to have contact over longer periods of time, staff got to know both parents and children better. Because the relationship with parents and staff was closer, more of a family atmosphere was established.

2. Secondly, students enjoyed working with a wider age range, particularly the opportunity to work with younger children - the younger the age, the more dramatic the development.

3. Thirdly, students believed childcare provides a much needed social service for working parents, particularly lower income families, and they hope more qualified staff in the service will help change community attitudes towards childcare.

Nga Kohanga Reo and Pacific Island Early Childhood Education Centres

Students who chose nga kohanga reo or Pacific Island early childhood education centres as their preferred service did so almost exclusively because of the importance they placed on children learning and retaining the languages and cultures involved, and because of their commitment to their whanau.

Second- and Third-year Students

When second- and third-year students were questioned about their reasons for preferring a particular service, the reasons they gave were similar to those of first-year students. However, as the study progressed from 1989 to 1992, students' attitudes changed noticeably from choosing services solely because of their conditions and philosophies to being more concerned about getting a job in any service that had vacancies.

Reasons Students Did Not Want To Work in a Particular Service

First-, second-, and third-year students were asked if they had any reasons for thinking they might *not* wish to work in particular kinds of early childhood services. The students' responses by college are summarised in table 9.

Table 9

First- second- and third-year students who did not want to work in a particular service

College	1st year N=84 N	%	2nd year N=74 N	%	3rd year N=43 N	%
Auckland*	28	28	13	16	11	17
Hamilton	9	24	7	23	3	15
Palmerston North**	20	49	19	53	12	38
Wellington	7	12	16	31	8	19
Christchurch	14	28	10	20	7	23
Dunedin	6	25	9	33	2	25
Total	84	27	74	28	43	22

* Significantly different from other colleges (chi sq = 7.69, p = 0.02, df = 2).
** Significantly different from other colleges (chi sq = 6.35, p = 0.04, df = 2).

In their first year 27 percent of students across the 6 colleges said they had reasons for *not* wanting to work in particular centres. There were quite marked differences in the students' responses by college, ranging from only 12 percent of students in Wellington, compared with 49 percent in Palmerston North, who said they had reasons for thinking they might not want to work in a particular service. The pattern did not change much in the second and third years. The overall percentage stayed much the same in the students' second year (28 percent). There was a slight decrease in the third year with 22% of those students across the 6 colleges who responded also having reasons for thinking they might not want to work in a particular early childhood service.

Of the first-year students who answered "Yes" to this question, the majority said they had reasons for not wanting to work in childcare - either full day or sessional centres. By far the most common reason was poor pay and working conditions, including long hours and short holidays. As one student commented:

> My image of childcare was of unqualified workers with a poor teacher/pupil ratio. I didn't want to be part of it - long hours, less pay, fewer holidays.

In a range of other reasons, mentioned by only 2 or 3 students in most cases, students referred to childcare being just a "babysitting service", to children being better off at home with their mothers; to the lack of structure in the programme and their lack of interest in working with very young children - "crying babies and nappies!".

Another group of students said they had reasons for not wishing to work in either nga kohanga reo or Pacific Island early childhood education centres. This was almost always because they could not speak Maori or a Pacific Island language and had limited knowledge of the cultures.

When second- and third-year students were asked whether they had any reasons for *not* wanting to work any particular services, the services and reasons they gave were similar to first-year students.

Students Who Had Changed Their Mind About a Preferred Service

In each year students were also asked if they had changed their mind about their preferred service since they had been at college.

First-year Students

Over all, about 20 percent of students across the 6 colleges had changed their mind about their preferred service since the course began, but there were differences between colleges ranging from only 4 students in Hamilton (11 percent) to 18 students in Christchurch (35 percent).

The majority of the students who said they had changed their mind had previously indicated that they would prefer to work in a kindergarten, with some being uncertain at the beginning of their training as to which service they preferred. Many of them still did prefer kindergarten, but they indicated that at least they were now prepared to consider other services, particularly childcare. Of those students who had previously thought they would like to work in a kindergarten, most indicated that the experiences they had had on the course - particularly practical, enjoyable experiences in the field - had made them realise that they could work in childcare. They also found they quite enjoyed the younger and mixed-age group:

> At the beginning I wanted to work in a kindergarten but since then I've been posted in a day care and I really, really enjoyed it. I like having the mixed age groups and having the children for the whole day rather than the half day.

> I have changed my idea on childcare being dens of unhappy, deprived children. If I could not get a job in a kindergarten I would consider a job in childcare if I could have some control over policy making.

> I haven't changed my mind completely but I feel much more comfortable with infants and toddlers and feel I could enjoy working with them now that I have experience - very rewarding.

> A realisation that teachers in childcare do more teaching than I originally realised.

There was a feeling amongst some students that they were "more needed" in childcare. By having children for a longer time from an earlier age, teachers got to know parents and children better and were more influential.

One student, who originally said she wanted to work in a kindergarten, now wrote:

> I want to concentrate on special needs children and intend to (in the long term) become part of an early intervention team, in which case I see myself as going to all the centres in this capacity. This idea has built up over the year.

The students who had originally said they preferred childcare were still happy to work there but had realised they could work in either setting. They had become increasingly aware of the longer hours and less attractive working conditions of childcare.

Second- and Third-year Students

In their second year, 67 (26 percent) of students across the 6 colleges said they had changed their mind about which early childhood service they would like to work in when they had finished their training. In their third year the figure was 44 (22 percent). Students often ticked more than one category. Their responses indicate that they were now more receptive to the possibility of working in a wider range of services than had been the case when they began their training. When asked their reasons for changing

their minds, most second- and third-year students who were now opting for kindergarten noted that working conditions in childcare had influenced their decision. Those who were now prepared to consider childcare said they had had positive experiences in centres.

Preferred Age Group of Children

Third-year Students

Third-year students were asked which age group of children they would prefer to work with in an early childhood centre by ranking the various age groups. The majority of students (78 percent) ranked 3- and 4-year-olds first; 26 percent chose birth to 2 years, 12 percent chose 5- to 7-year-olds; and 4 percent chose other primary school-aged children as their first ranking.

The Services for Which the Course Prepared Students

Second- and third-year students were asked to indicate whether or not their training was preparing them equally well for the various early childhood services. More than half (53 percent) of the second-year students across all colleges believed their course was preparing them equally well for work in both kindergartens and childcare. A further 27 percent thought their training was preparing them for work in all early childhood services. Fifteen percent of students believed their course of training favoured kindergartens, and 3 percent childcare. There were some differences by college in the responses of second-year students. In particular, a higher proportion of Hamilton students than those in other colleges thought they were being prepared for all services.

The responses of third-year students are summarised by college in table 10.

Table 10

The services for which third-year students by college thought their course was preparing them

Services	Akld N=64 %	Ham* N=20 %	Pn Nth N=32 %	Wgtn N=43 %	Chch N=31 %	Dun N=8 %	Total N=201 %
Prepared for all services	17	15	13	33	29	25	21
Equally well kindergarten/childcare	64	55	53	51	58	63	57
Favours kindergarten	23	-	34	16	13	13	20
Favours childcare	2	15	-	9	-	-	4
No response	5	15	-	2	3	-	4
Total**	111	100	100	111	103	101	106

* Hamilton students' pattern of responses to this question were significantly different from other colleges (chi sq = 13.41, p = 0.0004, df = 3).

** The total does not always sum to 100 percent as some third-year students chose more than 1 category. Three students did not specify their college.

It can be seen from table 10 that the overall pattern of students' responses across the 6 colleges was similar in their third year to their second year. Students were most likely to indicate that their training had prepared them equally well for both kindergarten and childcare. However, there were differences by college. Wellington students, for example, were about twice as likely to think their training had prepared them for all services compared with Auckland, Hamilton, and Palmerston North. Palmerston North students were more likely than students from other colleges to think their training favoured kindergartens. Hamilton students by comparison were significantly more likely than students at the other colleges to think that their training favoured childcare.

Teaching Practice

Second- and third-year students were questioned about the number and range of teaching practice sections they had been on. (Second-year students were asked to list the teaching practices they had been on in their first and second years, and third-year students were asked to list the teaching practice they had been on in their third year). Nearly all students had been on some type of teaching practice with 97 percent, 95 percent, and 98 percent noting that they had been on section in their first, second, and third years respectively. The kind of practice experience offered to students was influenced by the availability of centres. A higher proportion of students had had teaching practice sections in kindergartens than in both all-day and sessional childcare centres (83 percent compared with 63 percent of students). As the students went through their training the range of centres visited increased, e.g., 39 percent of third-year students, compared with 16 percent of first-years, went on teaching practice to a centre other than a kindergarten or childcare centre. Examples of the range of centres were creches, playcentres, playgroups, nga kohanga reo, Pacific Island early childhood education centres, Montessori preschool, IHC, crippled children, and new entrant classes. Some of these latter were for short periods of about a week compared with the more usual placements of 4-6 weeks.

As well as regular sections, students from all colleges paid shorter visits to a range of early childhood centres for a variety of reasons. Seventy-one percent of second-year and 60 percent of third-year students visited centres for reasons other than teaching sections. It was hard to quantify differences by college, but of all the colleges, students in Hamilton were most likely to have made more frequent visits to the widest range of centres. Ninety-three percent of Hamilton students indicated that they had visited one of a range of centres. This percentage compared, for example, with only 19 percent of students from Palmerston North.

STUDENTS' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In their second and third years, students were asked a series of questions about their personal and professional development during the course. In the second year, students were asked if they could identify "key events", either positive or negative, which stood out in their first or second year. They were also asked what impact the programme had had on them personally, and to comment on their professional development as an early childhood worker. In their third year, they were asked to comment on the most successful aspects of their training, and on any things that were not done well, along with suggestions for change. As one would expect, student responses to these related issues overlapped and were often repetitive.

We are not going to report here in detail by college on the students' responses to these questions for a number of reasons. First, the training programmes for all colleges were in their first year when we surveyed students. Now that the settling-down phase has passed, programmes have been modified and courses changed, so that data will have dated rapidly. Second, the variation in sample size by college makes it particularly inappropriate to compare the reactions of students between colleges on the basis of qualitative data derived from single questions in a questionnaire. Finally, many of the students' responses were idiosyncratic and difficult to classify. What we have been able to do, is isolate some issues raised by students which appear to be common across colleges and indicate the basis for students' judgments about their experience of programmes.

The Second Year

Seventy percent of students across colleges identified "key" events during their first 2 years at college which influenced how they regarded their training experience. Positive comments outnumbered negative by about 2 to 1. The positive experiences of students can be divided into 2 broad types: those concerning relationships with staff and other students, and those concerning the programme itself, particularly the content of individual courses and experience on teaching practice sections.

The attitude of staff towards students, and their professional skill and personal qualities, are obviously of crucial importance. Two students commented:

> Certain lecturers were so enthusiastic and welcoming. They gave a boost to my confidence.

> Early childhood tutors who I feel are available as friends and confidants and have noticed when I needed their help and could help them.

Of almost equal importance is the friendship and support within the group of students.

> I enjoyed the unity of Div. E. I'll certainly cry when we graduate and leave each other.

> A group of students were friendly and supportive, more so than the others. Up to the present they still are. We are all good friends, both in and out of college.

These potential relationships are there from the first day. About 20 percent of students referred to the orientation programme as being a "key event" emphasising the important of students' feeling fully welcome from the outset.

> Tutor groups were a brilliant way to get to know one tutor and a few classmates on the first day.

> The variety of social events put on to welcome students to college. A good way of meeting and talking to people.

Here as elsewhere, students emphasised the importance of practical experience in early childhood centres - opportunity to "be out there, doing what we are trained for". These experiences were more likely to be referred to than the in-college courses, although individual students singled out courses - professional studies, cultural awareness, and special needs to give examples. Others referred to the programme as a whole, for example the flexibility of the timetable allowing for choice in the courses taken.

These positive experiences commonly led to increased self-awareness and confidence on the part of students, and a number of students considered their own personal development to be the key event of the first 2 years of college.

The negative events referred to by students were more wide ranging than the positive. One of the major concerns of students, namely the difficulties they had in coping with financial problems and associated problems of accommodation, were largely outside the control of lecturers.

The major issue which was within the province of the lecturers was the organisation and management of the programme, referred to by about 25 percent of students across the 6 colleges. The students' comments were usually to do with timetabling which allowed for too much spare time, or to a sense that the programme was poorly organised so that students lacked direction.

Smaller numbers of students referred to the poor quality of a minority of lectures and lecturers; confusion about assessment; all students being treated like school leavers; uneven workload leading to stress when too many assignments were due at once; poor teaching practice experiences; and the isolation of the early childhood programme within the college.

When students referred to their personal development as a consequence of participating in the programme they tended to focus on one or more of the following:

- their increased confidence and maturity because of the wide range of people they had met and the diverse experiences they had had;

- their improved communication skills and ability to relate to people, including increased sensitivity to the needs of others; and

- their changed attitudes towards a number of professional matters, particularly the importance of early childhood education but also a heightened awareness of cultural and equity issues

These personal skills were an important component of the developing professional skills as described by second-year students. One of these professional skills was simply the concept of what it means to be a professional and to act professionally at all times. Among the most important professional skills listed by second-year students were:

- knowledge of child development and the needs of individual children;
- communication between adults and children, including the importance adult/child language;
- programme planning;
- working with parents; and
- working with other staff.

The Third Year

By the end of their third year virtually all students felt that they had been prepared either "quite well" (53 percent) or "very well" (42 percent) for their first teaching position. When students commented on the most successful aspects of the programme they were likely to comment on one or more of the following:

- The coverage of the early childhood curriculum as a whole, or particular areas through individual courses, for example, science, music, or the language arts.
- The value of practical experience in early childhood centres.
- The way the college experience had contributed to their personal and academic development.
- Their increased knowledge of child development, including heightened awareness about children with special needs.
- Their developing skills at working with parents and the wider community.
- Increased cultural and equity awareness.

When students suggested possible changes to programmes of training, 3 topics dominated their responses. These were:

1. Specific areas of the curriculum which they either thought had not been covered adequately, or had had too much emphasis, including multicultural and bicultural components.

2. Organisational weaknesses within the programme including repetition, inadequate workload, and wasted time, leading a number of students to suggest a shorter course. Others would have liked more flexibility in choosing options.

3. The need for more practical experience in early childhood centres.

Interest in Other Occupations

During the planning stages of the project, a lecturer commented that in her experience students in training tended to have rather limited knowledge of future career options for trained early childhood workers. In our questionnaire the third-year students were asked to indicate on a set list of occupations if they thought they might be interested in any of these positions in the future. Most of the students (88 percent) said they would be interested. Their responses by occupation are summarised in table 11.

Table 11

Future occupational options of third-year students

N = 201

Occupation	N	%
Officer of the Ministry of Education	26	13
Officer of the Education Review Office	27	13
Officer of the Special Education Service	84	42
Officer of the Early Childhood Development Unit	90	45
City Council community worker	57	28
Tertiary lecturer	56	28
Educational psychologist	49	24
Educational researcher	45	22
Other	38	22
Total	472	

It is clear from table 11 that within the options listed, students were most likely to think of future employment as an officer in the Early Childhood Development Unit or the Special Education Service. These were the first 2 choices for students across the 6 colleges with the exception of students from Hamilton. For Hamilton students the first choice was the Early Childhood Development Unit (75 percent), but this was followed by being an educational researcher (50 percent). In the other colleges fewer than a quarter of students referred to the possibility of being an educational researcher. In Christchurch only 10 percent did so.

Occupations other than those listed which students referred to included communications counselling, social work, and youth aid and child abuse work in the police force. A few students noted that because of the shortage of jobs they would consider a range of alternative options in order to be employed.

Students' Financial Assistance

Third-year Students

Of the 201 students who completed the third-year questionnaire, 200 responded to questions about their financial backing. Twenty percent of students did not receive any financial aid. Those who did receive financial aid were most likely to receive a tertiary grant (66 percent). Smaller numbers of students received other forms of financial assistance. These included a retraining grant or aid from the Maori or Pacific Island Education Foundations (8 percent); a training incentive allowance (6 percent); the domestic purposes benefit (6 percent); and an accommodation allowance (2 percent). Twelve percent of students said they received some other type of grant from the Department of Social Welfare or other organisations.

Perceived Adequacy of Training Allowance

Students in all years of training were asked about the adequacy of their training allowance. In each year about three-quarters of the students described their allowance as either "less than adequate" or "quite unrealistic". The student views are summarised in table 12.

Table 12

Adequacy of training allowance

	Year 1 N = 308		Year 2 N = 251		Year 3 N = 188	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Generous	7	2	2	1	6	3
Adequate	67	22	56	22	45	22
Less than adequate	134	44	112	43	72	36
Quite unrealistic	100	32	81	31	65	32

Nearly half of the third-year students added a comment about their training allowance, for example:

I received no student allowance and found it less than adequate and quite unrealistic to meet my living standards.

Because of my parents' income I don't get support from the Government, but my parents don't support me so this has been a real struggle.

The most financially stressful year ever!

Supplementary Income

In each year of their training students were asked about the ways they supplemented their income. They were asked to respond to a set list of possible sources of income. The student responses by year are summarised in table 13.

Table 13

Students' supplementary income

Income source	Year 1 N = 316 N	%	Year 2 N = 260 N	%	Year 3 N = 201 N	%	Combined total N	%
Holiday work	156	30	116	45	95	47	367	41
Evening/weekend work	118	23	107	41	79	39	304	34
Babysitting	76	28	64	25	54	27	194	27
Help in kind from parents	70	14	38	15	64	32	172	20
Parents	47	9	68	26	33	16	148	17
Other	44	9	32	12	48	24	124	15

Across all years students were most likely to supplement their income through holiday work (41 percent) or evening and weekend work (34 percent), followed by babysitting (27 percent). The percentage of students supplementing their income through evening and weekend work increased quite substantially between the first year (23 percent) to the third year (39 percent). Babysitting remained fairly constant. Financial support and support in kind from parents showed the most dramatic increase, the percentage of students saying they received such assistance doubling in each case between the first and third years.

As well as referring to the supplementary sources of income listed, 15 percent of students over the three years mentioned other sources. Among those listed were support from partner's income, financial support from family and friends, fundraising, and bartering.

THE FIRST YEAR AFTER TRAINING

In the year after students had completed their training we sent them a further questionnaire to find out how many were now employed in early childhood centres, and to look at their attitudes towards the course and the training they had received. Questionnaires were sent to 170 people, of whom 153 (90 percent) replied. The first-year teachers from Dunedin were surveyed in 2 groups as those taking a B.Ed. course spent a year longer in training. What follows is an analysis of the results across the 6 colleges.

Number of Jobs Applied For

Most ex-students had applied for at least 1 or 2 jobs in early childhood centres before being appointed, and 24 had applied for more than 5 jobs (*see* table 14).

Table 14
Number of early childhood jobs applied for by students
N = 153

Number of jobs	N	%
None	21	14
1 - 2	48	31
3 - 4	24	16
5 - 6	24	16
7+	33	22
No answer	3	2
Total	153	101*

* Due to rounding this total is more than 100 percent.

Employment of Ex-students

- 132 (86 percent) were employed in an early childhood service.
- 21 (14 percent) were *not* employed in an early childhood service.

Present Situation for Those *Not* Working in an Early Childhood Service

The ex-students who were not working in an early childhood service gave, as reasons for not doing so, continuing with a B.A. or B.Ed. programme, finding alternative work such as a school co-ordinator, the difficulty of finding work in the local area, a change of mind about working in early childhood services, and personal reasons such as a marriage breakup. The ex-students were then asked if a job were available would they work in early childhood services in the future. Forty responded including a number who were at present in relieving positions:

- 35 indicated they would work in an early childhood service in the future.
- 5 indicated they would not work in an early childhood service in the future.

Present Situation for Those Working in an Early Childhood Service

The majority of ex-students who were working in an early childhood service were working in kindergartens:

- 62 (41 percent) were working in kindergartens.
- 44 (29 percent) were working in all-day childcare.
- 13 (8 percent) were working in sessional childcare.

A number of ex-students also indicated they were relieving teachers; one of these was working in a variety of different centres and the others are included in the kindergarten figures.

Three first-year teachers were working in nga kohanga reo and 3 in Pacific Island early childhood education centres. Three were nannies. Two first-year teachers were working for an Intellectually Handicapped Centre (IHC)/early intervention and 1 was with family daycare.

Several were working part-time in more than 1 centre and a number had worked in more than 1 during the year.

Working in First Choice of Employment

When those who were working in an early childhood service were asked if their present job was their first choice of service, 86 (65 percent) first-year teachers replied "yes" and 46 (35 percent) "no". The 46 who were not working in their first choice of service were asked which, of a number of options, explained their situation. Their responses are listed:

- 16 had taken the first job offered to them.
- 8 had not been able to find a job in their first choice of service.
- 7 had not been able to find a job in their first choice of service in the area where they lived.
- 4 thought the working conditions in their first choice of service were not good enough (3 of these were working in a childcare centre and 1 a kindergarten).

Length of Time in Position

Most first-year teachers, 51 (39 percent), expect to stay in their present position for 1 to 2 years. Thirty (23 percent) expect to stay there for 3 to 4 years, 7 (5 percent) expect to stay for longer than 4 years, and 25 (19 percent) were unsure. However, 19 (14 percent) expect to study for less than 12 months.

General Comments About Their Job

The first-year teachers were given the opportunity to make any comments they wished about their present job. About 20 made what could be described as neutral comments, that is they referred to such things as being a relieving teacher, or taking a position because it was close to home, and several did not make any comment. Of the remaining comments, rather more than three-quarters were positive, and about a quarter negative.

Positive Comments

At least a third of all the comments made by first-year teachers expressed their general enthusiasm for the job which they described as "excellent", "enjoyable", "rewarding", "satisfying", and "a lot of fun". The first-year teachers were challenged by the demands placed on them and the skills needed to do the job but most appeared to be coping well.

> I really enjoy my work. I feel that teaching in early childhood education is what I want to do for a long time. My present job is very rewarding. I am working in a quality centre with very professional staff.

> I am finding my teaching position rewarding and challenging. I'm very happy.

Where first-year teachers were more specific about the reasons for their job satisfaction, they tended to single out their pleasure in working with children; the professional support they were receiving from working as a team with other committed staff; the challenge of putting their training into practice; the quality of the parental and community involvement and support; and the pleasant relaxed environment and excellence of the resources. They were also pleased with how much they had learnt during their first year. Some comments were specific to individual teachers, for example, one working in a Pacific Island early childhood education centre spoke of her pleasure in being able to speak using her own first language. Examples of the teachers' comments were:

> I am grateful to be working with an excellent head teacher who is most professional. I am learning so much from her valuable experience.

> I have found the staff and senior staff very supportive which has made it easy to transfer theory to practice.

> I have the help and support from parents and have found this to be fabulous especially the feedback.

> I prepared all the year's programme for the children putting in as much as I could of my teaching practice experiences and in-class theory practice work.

> My kindergarten is only 2 years old and having all the modern facilities certainly helps in the long run.

Negative Comments

Most of the negative responses were made by first-year teachers teaching in other than kindergartens, usually all-day or sessional childcare. However, it should also be noted that the positive comments made by teachers teaching in these settings outnumbered the negative. Two childcare teachers wrote, for example:

> Excellent staff. Well run centre. Lots of variety and comfortable atmosphere. Good working conditions and environment.

> It is excellent! I'm working with both trained and untrained staff which is interesting. My boss is really flexible and our childcare seems to run smoothly most of the time. It's tiring but I'm enjoying it.

One family daycare worker wrote:

> Excellent training sessions. Thoroughly enjoyable and I learn heaps. Valuable support system. Hours have recently been increased because of huge project growth. Valued highly as an employee.

Most of the critical comments were about working conditions, particularly long hours and low pay, and the stress of the job. Half a dozen first-year teachers referred to problems caused by having to work for private providers, and a similar number complained of having to work alongside untrained staff or people associated with the centre who did not appreciate the professional training which the first-year teacher had just completed. Older, "tired" staff with entrenched attitudes made it difficult for a few of the younger teachers to put their own philosophy and ideas into practice. The need for re-training of such teachers was mentioned. Individual teachers referred to the problems of getting trained relievers, and to pressure from parents. Two first-year teachers employed in a kohanga reo referred to the problem of attracting trained teachers to nga kohanga reo who were also speakers of Maori. Two or three first-year teachers also referred to perceived inadequacies in their training in preparing them for the particular job they now had. This was usually because they had had to assume more responsibility than might have been expected for a first-year teacher and did not feel they knew enough about administration and management. A few referred to inadequate preparation for working with specific groups of children, for example, under-2-year-olds. Examples of critical comments were:

> I am presently working in a childcare centre as supervisor. It is a high stress job - long hours and poor pay. The management committee which runs the centre have no professionalism when it comes to early childhood practices. The committee requested that I work illegally by taking children over and above our licensed number. This I rejected, of course, but have been under stress as a result.

> Implications that childcare is not as good as kindy. That kindy teachers are "better". Pay is lousy, especially when stress, "dirt money" type situation, ruining clothes etc., considered. Importance of contact with parents, but often not enough time to do it in a relaxed manner.

> The hours are long. I work a full 8 hours plus travel. It works out to a 9-10 hour day. The politics within the centre I wasn't prepared for.

> Working in this area with untrained staff is very difficult to get them to do an appropriate service for the public.

Preparation for Work in Early Childhood Services

The ex-students, whether they were now working in an early childhood service or not, were given the opportunity to make up to 4 comments about how they thought their training had prepared them for work in early childhood education. The range of comments made by the ex-students was similar across the 6 colleges where they had trained, although there were differences in emphasis. However, these differences were difficult to quantify in qualitative data of this kind. Over all, about half of the ex-students' responses were general positive comments to the effect that their training had prepared them well for working in early childhood services:

> I believe my training contributed immensely in relation to work in early childhood education. Each course was packed with information that I am now practising.

> When I think about what I knew about early childhood education when I first started and what I know now - I learnt so much. Over all, I think training college prepared me as best it could. The rest of the learning comes with experience in the job.

> College gave me a good overview of ECE as a whole. Three years of notes are now an invaluable resource!

> It encouraged me to believe in ECE as a profession not just a job.

> I felt very confident in taking on this teaching job due to being well prepared.

Where ex-students made more specific comments they singled out one or more of the following aspects of their training which college courses had provided:

- a sound theoretical basis for practical work in centres,
- knowledge of child development and behaviour,
- practice in setting goals and programme planning,
- experience in working with a wide age range of children,
- training in working with parents,
- communication skills with children and adults,
- knowledge of services available in the community, and
- increased awareness of equity issues.

A few ex-students singled out particular courses which they had found helpful, for example, working with children with special needs.

> I am linking theory with practice and finding I have a much broader knowledge base than my two colleagues who trained over 5 years ago.

> It has given me a theoretical basis to work from. It is recognised and used by other team members who seek out information from me.

> Human relation classes helped me become prepared for working with a variety of people.

> The course has given me the knowledge and confidence to talk in a professional way with parents and staff.

> Staff are currently finding it difficult to work with children who are just 3. The waiting list children are beginning afternoon sessions at a younger age. This is no problem to me as I have experienced a wider age range of children through childcare in my training.

Ex-students were more likely than not to be positive in their comments, but at least a quarter of their comments were critical of aspects of their training. This was most likely to be the case with students who had trained in Hamilton and Auckland, and least likely with students who had trained in Wellington and Palmerston North. Critical comments tended to be about 3 related issues:

1. The course was too theoretical and not sufficiently practical.
2. Lecturers were out of touch with what working in an early childhood centre was really like so that they were "too enthusiastic" and had idealistic and unrealistic views of what could be achieved in a centre.
3. Students were not sufficiently well prepared for administrative and management responsibilities.

Examples of the range of comments were:

Over all the course was really good but the administrative side could have had more coverage. Students need more practical experience in really working in a centre rather than just going on section and not being included in the staff ratio.

Not nearly enough preparation or insight to the "real working world", that is, people's attitudes, differences in training, methods of becoming part of a team instead of being squeezed into a space they make for you.

I find it very difficult to adjust to the centre's planning routines and organisation after learning very specific ideas and philosophies. Change is very slow.

Training is fine except for the thoughts and actions of people with different training who work in early childhood. Students should be warned that the outside world does not want highly trained graduates. Childcare and kindergarten is NOT the same in conditions or work so cannot be lumped together. Childcare does not recognise a person's training. Too many so-called untrained experts are running things.

Training gave "the ideal" of teaching and it's been very disappointing to realise that I cannot possibly do it all according to the ideal. I can only do my best.

It didn't prepare me for what it is really like - painted a rather golden picture. It was too progressive for what is operating out there in many centres.

Comments on Improving Training

Ex-students were asked if they had any suggestions as to how their training could be improved. They raised similar issues regardless of the college where they had trained, although once again the emphasis varied from college to college. Not surprisingly, there was overlap between the critical comments ex-students had already made about their training, and their views on how courses of training could be improved. About 40 percent of the comments referred to the need for more teaching practice sessions, and for courses to be more practical. Examples of practical activities were ideas and activities for mat time, for small and large groups, and for more courses on behaviour management techniques. Comments about the need for more practical experience were most likely to be made by ex-students who had trained at Palmerston North, and least likely by those trained at Hamilton.

Most of the other suggestions tended to fall into the following categories. In order of importance these were:

- Better overall planning and organisation of courses for the maximum benefit of students, with less time wasted. For some students this meant more compulsory curriculum courses rather than electives. For others it meant the re-ordering of courses, for example, courses on child health should come earlier in the course.
- More courses in specific areas. The area most commonly referred to was courses on management and administration, including how to cope with the paper work in an early childhood centre and charter development. Small groups or individual students referred to the need for more courses in, for example, music, and illness management, and for a need for more assistance to encourage closer links between early childhood staff and parents and early childhood centres and schools.
- More emphasis on increasing students' awareness of social and political issues of relevance to early childhood.
- Recognition of students' prior learning and experiences.
- Between 10 and 15 percent of ex-students (more in Hamilton and none in Christchurch) thought there should be more emphasis on biculturalism and taha Maori.
- About 12 percent of ex-students (more in Dunedin and none in Hamilton) thought students should have more opportunity to work with a wider age range of children.
- About 5 percent of ex-students (more in Christchurch and none in Palmerston North, Auckland, or Dunedin), thought the 3-year course should be reduced in length. These teachers, and others, spoke of time wasted during the course.

Examples of the range of comments made by ex-students about ways courses of training could be improved were:

A lot more teaching experience, but this was impossible because of the large number of students and the small number of early childhood services available.

I would have liked to have had more practical training workshops rather than mostly theory.

Much more time in early childhood centres. More learning there than in college. More time spent on special needs, communication skills, the arts.

Working with large groups, learning through play etc. Many of the ideas are great with 5-8 children but are difficult to work with 20 children when you are alone.

Less pointless essay work, more practical application. More tips on realistic behaviour management.

More about the running of an early childhood service - administrative work, regulations, etc.

There needed to be more practical administration skills. More responsibility for general administration tasks, counting rolls, enrolments, ordering, etc., on TE's.

Not enough time in other areas of the curriculum, for example, under-2s.

Not preparing you for parents who only want to drop their child off and pick them up, with no other support for you or your centre. Not being made aware of certain aspects - like parents still wanting care for violently ill children.

More work on the 5- to 8-year-old bracket. Preparation early primary years.

More under 2s development. Also over 2s. That is, its physical stages. More on child's illnesses and hygiene, contagious sicknesses. Perhaps more electives, that is, have options for more than 2 electives. More in-depth studies of areas.

I would have achieved more in te reo Maori if I had had a vocabulary and regular testing.

Parent/teacher relations are just as important as child/teacher relations. We needed to have more skills in working in this area.

CONCLUSION

This report is based on the experiences of students in the 6 New Zealand colleges of education who undertook a 3-year course of training to work in early childhood centres. Students in 2 of the colleges, Palmerston North and Dunedin, began their training in 1988, but those in Christchurch and Hamilton did not begin until 1989, and those in Auckland and Wellington until 1990. The students' year of completion was similarly staggered, with most students from the first 2 colleges ending their preservice training in the same year that those in the last 2 colleges were only beginning. This is important, because not only did the students' experience differ according to the institution where they trained, but the years of training varied between colleges in a time of change both within the educational sector and the wider community.

The aim of the study was to find out students' expected employment following their training, that is, childcare, kindergarten, or other early childhood services; to monitor any changes in the students' intentions during training; and to establish where students were employed after they had completed their training. At the time the study was initiated these were important questions. Prior to 1998 students planning to work in kindergartens were trained separately from those expecting to become childcare employees, and the state took a closer interest in the supply of kindergarten teachers.

When most training programmes were integrated into a 3-year programme at a college of education important issues were: would the training programme cater equally well for all early childhood services, and would students entering the programme be committed to one or other service before they began training? If this latter position was the case, would the training experience itself encourage students to consider other options for employment within the early childhood sector?

The study clearly shows that although the college programmes were designed to prepare students for work in a range of early childhood services, at the point of entry to training the majority of students had a clear idea of which service they wished to work in, and 78 percent of these students across the 6 colleges favoured working in kindergartens when they had completed their preservice courses. This percentage remained remarkably consistent throughout their training, and at the end of the 3-year course kindergarten was still the preferred service of the majority of students. With some variation between colleges, the training courses provided students with an opportunity to experience a wider range of services than those with which they were previously familiar, and this did encourage many students to think more positively about working in services other than kindergartens. However, they were still likely to hold the view that the working conditions, hours, and pay were superior in kindergartens. On the other hand, a lack of available positions in kindergartens had led some students to seek employment in childcare.

Over all, students appeared to be committed to work in early childhood and believed that their training prepared them well for their chosen profession. They were appreciative of the opportunity provided for their own personal development, including the skills they developed in human relations and communication, and their heightened awareness of equity issues. These are obviously important for their professional development as well as those skills which focused more specifically on early childhood programmes and child development. Most would like more practical work as part of the courses of training, including more experience in centre administration and management. Some were critical of organisational and management problems within the college programmes, particularly wasted time. When

they completed their training, a high proportion of students were working in early childhood centres, most in the service of their first choice, and most expressed a high level of satisfaction with their job.

However, many changes have occurred during the 5 years of the study, and as these have had an impact on the training programmes themselves and on student attitudes towards training and employment, they too have to be acknowledged when the findings from the study are considered. Among some of the most significant changes are the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of early childhood training programmes by lecturing staff so that the programmes themselves changed during the course of our study; the development of the Bachelor of Education or similar university programmes within all colleges; the introduction of *Te Whaariki*, the new early childhood curriculum; the developing culture of accountability within the educational sector; the increase in student fees; and the tight job market. These last 3 factors have led to students in many training institutions becoming more critical of courses of training. If they are paying fees, they expect courses to satisfy their requirements and to be efficiently managed.

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